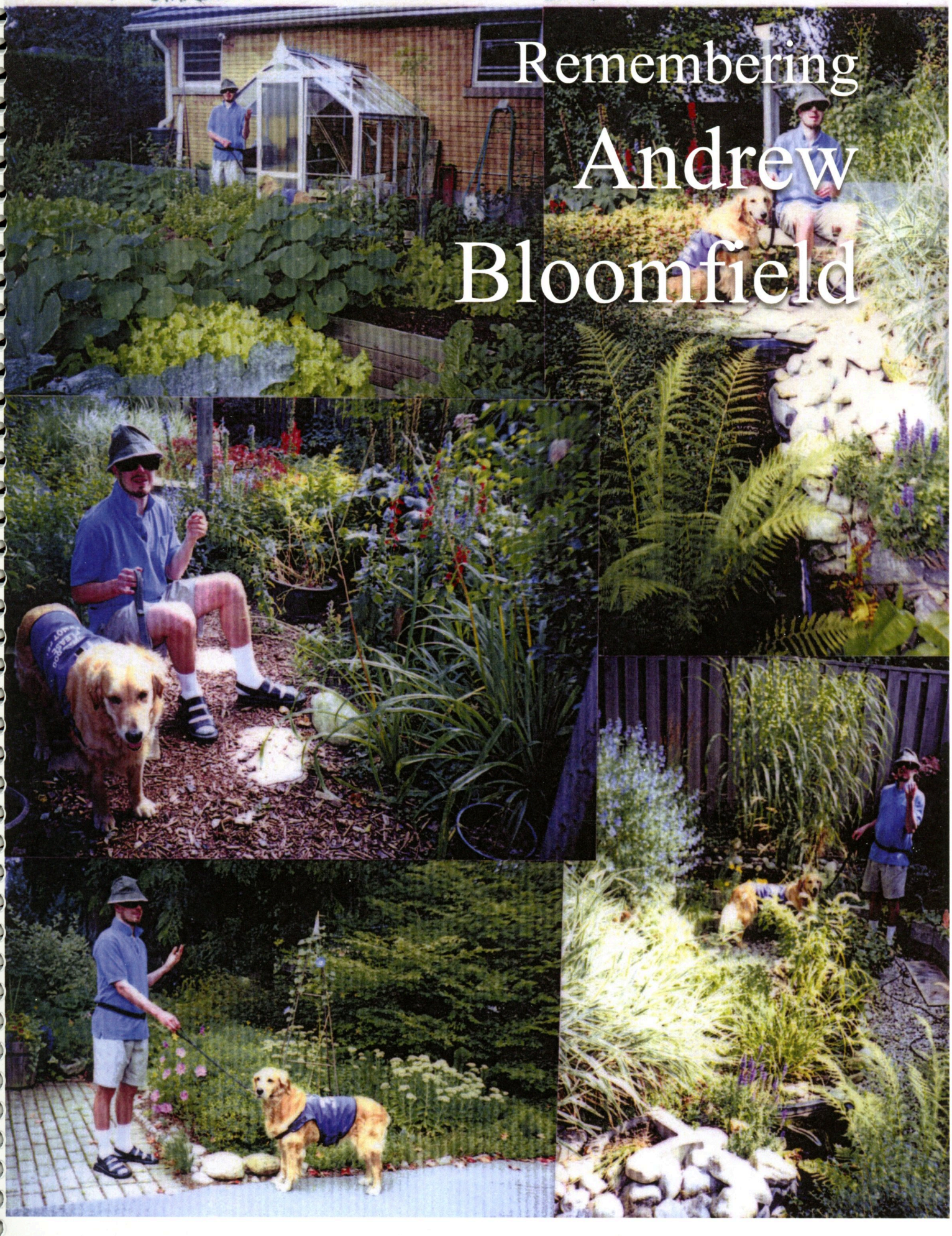
MY GARDEN IS HEAVEN ON EARTH!



Remembering Andrew Bloomfield

REMEMBERING ANDREW BLOOMFIELD, 1968-2024

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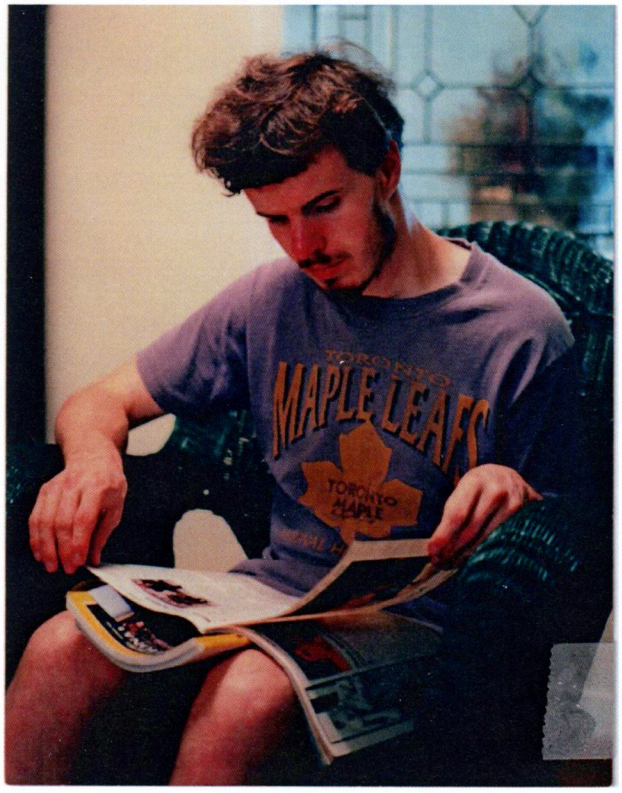
Thanks to all contributors,
and especially Marie Puddister
who designed the layout and formatted the text.

PORTRAITS OF ANDREW AND TWIN SISTER AND BEST FRIEND VICTORIA AT AGE 9, BY THEIR NEW ZEALAND GRANDMOTHER.

A GOOD MAN: ANDREW BLOOMFIELD, 1968-2024

Andrew Bloomfield was born in Auckland, New Zealand on 6 May 1968 and lived in Guelph from January 1969. At the age of four, he was diagnosed with what was then called "classic autism". He was a founding member of the first class for autistic children in Wellington County.



In his teens, the lack of local services meant that he had to live away from home, often at considerable distances from Guelph. In his memoir (2011) he told us how important his twin sister Vickie was in his learning to cope with what sometimes seemed an alien world. He was devastated by her death in a winter traffic accident in February 1996.

Since that time his parents Elizabeth and Gerald and his friends have supported the whole good life that was designed by and around Andrew and based in his own home. Unable to speak with his voice, he taught himself to read and, with the aid of Supported Typing, composed some 200 poems, was author of several books and, with assistance, envisioned and created many paintings. His most recent book was for children: ***Friendmakers*** is a series of stories about his companion dogs.

During his lifetime, he contributed to the development of many forms of support that have helped other people with complex needs. These included: creating a home of his own managed by a housing trust; imagining the self-directed support corporations we call Aroha entities (also known as microboards); and testing nutritional and sensory strategies to overcome severe health problems. Above all, he pioneered the communication support group Bridges-Over-Bridges which first met in January 2004.

Andrew made several videos about his life and inspired the short dramatic film ***Holding in the Storm*** (2013). His community influence was recognized by a Guelph Mayor's award in 2013 for being a "difference maker".

He will be missed by his parents, friends and running partners in the Riverside Park district, and by many others around the world.

WORKING WITH ANDREW

Andrew was a tidy man, keeping his rooms and house in orderly fashion. From an early age, he set the table for meals with mats and napkins. Dinner always had to be by candlelight which was gentle and comforting after busy days.

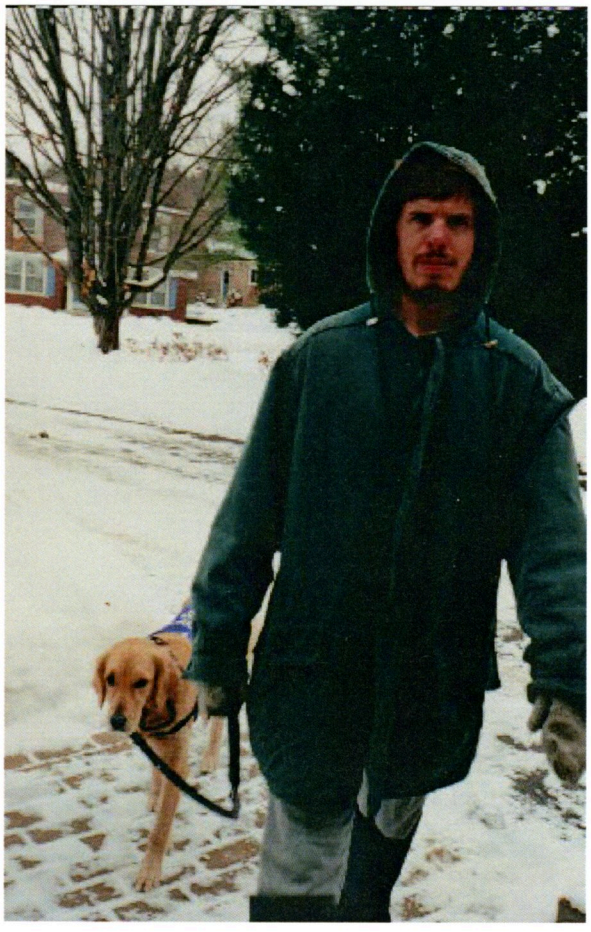
Given what we later knew as the movement disorders of Autism, we were always careful with sharp tools like scissors, knives and garden shears. We worried that he might make uncontrolled and dangerous movements.

All that changed in 1996 when Mrs Honeyman at Spirit Valley Farm asked if he would like to trim trees in a large plantation of conifers planted some decades earlier. Andrew Bloomfield led the way, usually with Andrew Foster and myself. He did all the cutting with long-handled shears, as well as a bow saw for the thicker branches while the two older men moved and stacked the brushwood.

This was a great turning-point: Andrew set the pace; we followed. He became adept with the tools and always worked carefully and safely. It was happy and companionable work, peaceful and gentle (no power tools!) and rewarded by mid-morning snacks in clearings that gradually became more like a natural cathedral. The only sounds were those of snipping and sawing, the breeze in the treetops, and birdsong. We always ended the work sessions feeling peaceful and refreshed, and very happy to return the following week. Work gave us all new confidence in Andrew's abilities and interests.

The skills learned in the woods remained with Andrew for the rest of his life. Waverly, with its many trees and shrubs, provided much work in trimming and shaping, and new skills emerged. He became an invaluable helper in building raised beds, sunken garden and brick pathways. Over the years he moved many tons of topsoil, mulch and building materials in his wheelbarrow. All this work transformed the Waverly property into my Green Oasis, Garden of Eden, and Heaven on Earth.

Andrew reflects: My experience at Spirit Valley made me "passionate about gardens, woods, plants of al kinds, and all things green. In planning my new home, we decided my ability to help in the garden could be expanded. I worked with G in building the raised beds and with E in planting and tending the gardens. We knew I could help and liked working outside and working with silent tools. Since I have lived in my own home, my garden and the environment have become very important to me... I also like to make things for my friends from my garden."



HEIDI ART ANGEL

I have had the privilege of supporting Andrew's high motivation in learning for 23 years. Our Green Man, Andrew, is exuberant in all the varied interests and passions that he shares and communicates eloquently in his books and poetry. These have inspired our collaborative art paintings displayed in his home and featured at past community events like the Eden Mills Arts Festival (in which we took part for several years with other Bridges members).

Despite many challenges in managing an unpredictable nervous system, Andrew wanted the world to see and appreciate his intelligence and unique perceptions of Autism. “I am who I am because a person believed in me. I am a Bloomfield." Andrew acknowledges that listening, valuing intelligence and creating a safe oasis for the autistic to flourish are vital for well-being. Even though Andrew is no longer with us physically, I feel his ongoing appreciation to his dear parents as well as all those who supported him in enjoying a rich and meaningful life.

In 2004, Andrew invited several Ontario adults who live with quite severe challenges of Autism to start a creative communication group where they could share their feelings, thoughts, concerns, and ideas. I took part in this event and was impressed with the kindness, respect and joy shown by these individuals as they welcomed this opportunity to have their voice shared and heard! They named their group Bridges - so appropriate for the connections they were making. These pioneers have a vision of "Bridges-Over-Barriers as a centre for friends and families who live with autism to come together to share support, ideas and strategies."

To continue Andrew's legacy, we can celebrate his life by keeping his treasured Bridges' dream alive. We begin with our gratitude to Andrew for gathering the ingredients for a good life for adults living with autism. Our deep listening skills foster the appreciation for a community that has feelings, needs, thoughts, concerns, and ideas that need to be expressed so that we know how to best serve it. Facilitators in supported typing, encouragers and safe spaces and places to meet are all required.

Although Andrew has enlightened me in many ways about Autism, there is so much more to learn. The journey continues as the greater community comes on board to learn to appreciate intelligence so we can find all the ways to support young adults to flourish and shine. I can see Andrew smiling in appreciation as we honour his dream of keeping Bridges alive and flourishing.

Andrew: "Green is my favourite colour. My garden is my green oasis, heaven on earth. The Green Man was our first painting on canvas. I think my life is full of good and sensible elements. I am happy. It is perfect. I like painting with Heidi. It is therapeutic and gives me great joy. My Green Man painting shows a forest and a man who is green and of the earth. It represents to me trying to stay connected to the earth. I am peering out from my own forest. I love words and metaphors and expressing my thoughts in poetry. When I composed my first poem in 2002, I added: "I like to write poems. It is like a song in my mind."

The "Listen!" painting is addressed to all our Bridges friends and supporters.

Poetry and Painting Partnership *AB 23 Jan 2013*

My words are a painting
and my paintings
show my words in colour and form.

I think about things
and they spill out in words
when a supporter comes along
and offers her hand beneath my fingers.

I like to let it melt out of me
like butter in the pan.
I think a painting would be yellow
to show the bright ideas
I sometimes have.

I wish I could believe
I have it in me to be an artist.
My ideas are transferred to canvas
by my painting partner
but I cannot create the scenes
with my own hands.

My mind knows what I have to say
but the hands can't get it
to look as I imagine it.
So I paint the picture with my words.

I know my paintings are
a collaboration,
and so it is a social
as well as a creative experience.

I think, I type,
I make art with my partner
and we share the time
and the glory of admiration.

Heidi Klaming - Andrew's Art Angel

Celebration of Painting *AB 8 October 2018 (A Green Day)*

I like the colours of the leaves outside.
They are beginning to change
and it is becoming like a paint palette.
Orange and red and yellow
and many different greens.

The colours remind me of the paintings
that Heidi and I work on.
The beginnings look like a canvas of white
then the paints get added
and the colours begin to explode.

It becomes one layer after another of
colours
and the faces and images come to life.
A blanket of white can be a snowy field,
a green bumpy garden, a pasture of fresh
grass.

It's all in the hands and the heart of the
artist.
A stroke here and a splash there
make the pictures seem real.

One season changes and becomes
another
and this is like the creation of a painting.
Keep adding and changing until it's just
like you feel it.

The seasons of the painting are as
changing as the seasons of the earth.

The painting keeps growing.
I will add a stroke of paint here
and a dab of colour there.

Just in case there's not enough,
I will splash some more on top.

The colours are full of vibrancy
and ready to explode....
It is a celebration of colours and textures,
strokes, shapes and sizes.

MIRACLES ALL AROUND

By Andrew Foster and Andrew Bloomfield *Published in The Presbyterian Record, May 2005*

Autism: Brain disorder that begins in early childhood and persists throughout adulthood; affects three crucial areas of development: communication, social interaction, and creative or imaginative play."

Spirituality: By seeing the miracles all around and counting my blessings, I feel some sense of spirituality in my soul. - Andrew Bloomfield

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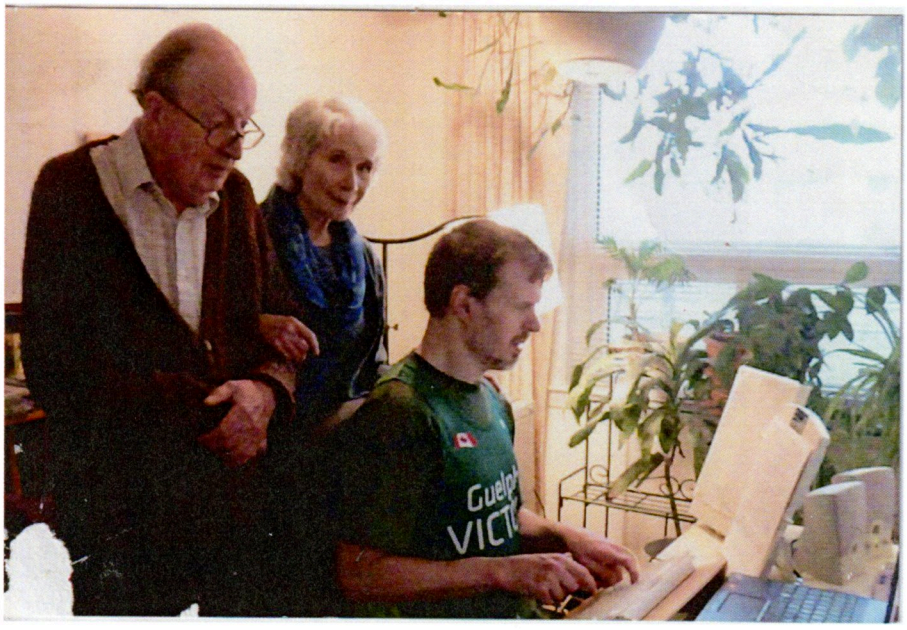
Andrew Bloomfield has lived with Autism for all his life. It's not hard to find a workable definition of it - most authorities seem to be in broad agreement. Spirituality was another matter, however. In the end, I used Andrew's own definition.

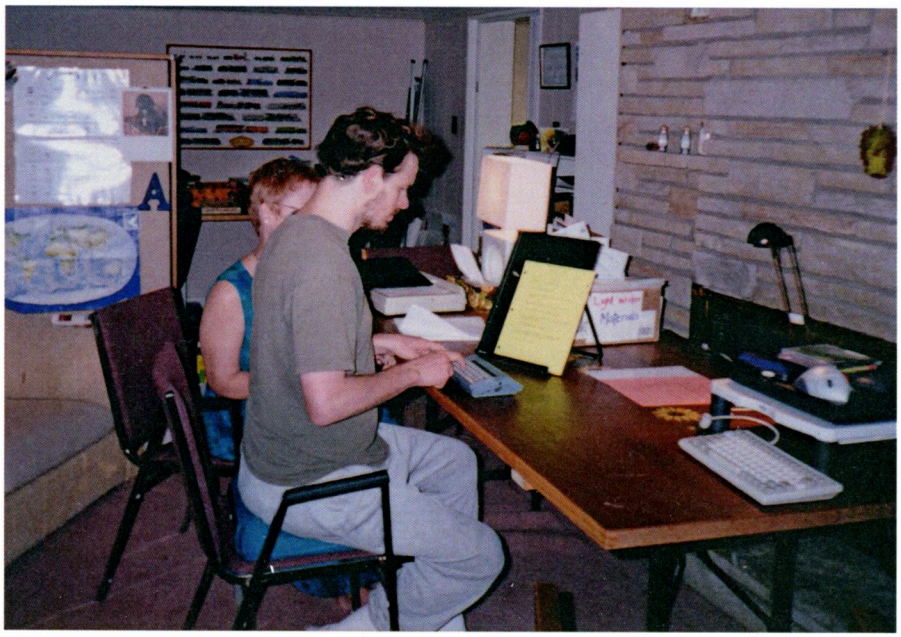
But why ask the questions? About the year 2000, through 'Facilitated Communication', or FC, Andrew Bloomfield made his interest and understanding of God's presence in his life clearly known to his family. Andrew himself started using the terms 'spirituality' and 'soul'."



FC involves a facilitator who supports, but does not guide, the elbow of the autistic person typing at a keyboard. Andrew's facilitators are paid therapists and unrelated to him. As far as possible, questions are put in a way that prevents the facilitator from guessing the answer. Andrew's hearing and comprehension are very acute - it is only the method of responding that needs to be facilitated. His other faculties also seem to be unusually acute. For instance, he can be very sensitive to the emotional state of a person in his presence, with no word being said on the subject.

When he made his interest known in 'spirituality', a friend suggested that he might like to visit his local Presbyterian church. Not unusually for a person with Autism, Andrew likes order and predictability, so when the church began major renovations, he decided to stay away for a while. Calling a new minister was a disruption too. His constant companion at church is his Golden Retriever service dog, Amy. He calls her his 'friendmaker' because she attracts attention and helps break the ice in a crowd of strangers.

The rest of the story is told in Andrew's own words. The questions were e-mailed to him, and he then copy typed them (which he does independently) and worked on them with his facilitator. This is what he had to say:



AF: When did you first become aware of spirituality in your life? Can you remember how old you were?

AB: I was a teenager. I felt a sense of awe at times outdoors, in the country. I felt there were miracles all around me. I didn't always see them.

AF: What is spirituality?

AB: By seeing the miracles all around and counting my blessings, I feel some sense of spirituality in my soul.

Twenty years later Andrew would use a modified definition of Spirituality as the quality of being concerned with the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things:

AF: Did any person or event influence you?

AB: I think I am often in the presence of spiritual people, so it rubs off. I knew that man did not create the world so it must have been a miracle.

AF: What is good and bad about church?

AB: I think there are moments of spirituality at church. But the people I don't know have interfered. [What moments at church?] *It is the presence of a spirit like God but not like God that they talk about. It is the atmosphere and the music and the readings and some of the good vibrations from others who are there. Church can be hard for my system with all the noise and busyness. It is hard to feel it with all the people, but I get a sense of spirituality from others. It is good to be in a spiritual place. Prayers sometimes touch me, but sometimes I don't hear them and don't get it. I get it when only one person is speaking or reading. With music, I like instrumental the best. The choir is OK. When everyone sings, it is hard for me, the noise and the standing. I like a good sermon best.*

AF: Can you describe the atmosphere in a church?

AB: The atmosphere is welcoming and safe. I think I feel wanted.

AF: Are you always aware of spirituality? Is there a special time to think about it?

AB: Walking outdoors. Being in the country. Being with friends who understand me.

AF: How can the church be better for people with conditions that make communication difficult?

AB: I think reaching out and asking what we need. I want church friends who will smile to me and say hello and sit with me sometimes. I could try to stay for the snack at church afterwards, but I would bring my own water and snack. I want to invite some new church friends to my home for tea and a board game or a walk, so they understand more about what it's like to be me and how they can help.

AF: Is there something you have written that you would like us to include in the article?

AB: One or two about what it's like to be me, my sense of God, and how important friends are to me. (He chose the following ....)

What it's like to be me (29 January 2003; set to music)
I'm a bundle of sensations
I get the urge
to touch and pick
and I must follow my urges.
Can you see my urges?
I can't tell you
I just show you.
I'm a bundle of nerves
and a jumble of thoughts.
I'm in constant motion
and my mind's always going.
I wonder what it's like to be you.
Do you wonder what it's like to be me?
I'm a time bomb waiting to explode
And a tear waiting to fall.

Being Content (November 2004)
It feels so nice this being content.
It is balance and good health.
It is love and friendship.
It is feeling secure and safe.
I am content and I thank you for that.

Sense of God (4 February 2004)
I had in mind that I feel God in my life these days.
I think God likes our messages and our home.
I wonder if God sees everything?
I think God is everywhere and in all of us.

My Friends New and Old

My friends touch me in so many ways
My friend Sunny touches me with music
Heidi with art and learning
Laurie new but gives me her attention
Beth touches me with her hands
and lets my words come forth
My new friends, when we gather,
touch me with their desire
to share life's journey.

Blessing for a Group of Friends (August 2004)
Bless this group of friends
who want to share with me and with each other.
Make us strong
and help us to be safe with each other. It is a spiritual experience to prepare and eat a meal with friends.

Idea of a Spirituality Group (January 2004)

I want poetry to be read and some prayers to be discussed and music and some mood things. How can we set the mood for spirituality to happen? Perhaps some pretty coloured cloth on a table. Only quiet ones. I like gentle natural colours in the fall. I like green leaves too. Blue I like but not quite as much as green. Indoors if a small group. I want to start here or in the home of friends. Spirit Valley if the weather is good. The right name. I like the focusing idea at the beginning. Brain gym and yoga work for me. Could be prayers of healing and help for people who are sad or sick. I'd like to see what might happen. Let's talk with others. Let's start with three other people. AF might talk about how Iona helps his spirituality. Get him to show a picture or two so I get the feeling of it.

FOUNDING MEMBERS OF BRIDGES 2005

Bridges gathering, Andrew's home, 30 September 2006.

BRIDGES-OVER-BARRIERS—

CONTINUING ANDREW'S LEGACY, 2024—

Andrew was deeply grateful to Guelph Services for the Autistic (GSA), his housing trust since 1998, for safeguarding his rights to lead his own life in the home that he had helped to create. In looking ahead to an uncertain future, his primary request was that he be supported to continue living in his home as the basis of his good life. Andrew's experience of growing into his own home is described in the GSA manual, *Creating a Home and Good Life of My Own* (2012) and on GSA's OAARSN website: *Creative Support Models* (2019).

Andrew also feels responsible for the Bridges Communication Group. He explains: Bridges-Over-Barriers is a creative communication group started in 2004 by six Ontario men who live with quite severe challenges of Autism. As we do not speak reliably with our voices, others might assume that we have nothing to say—even that we do not think or feel. But we are very expressive on many topics, supported by AAC technologies (augmentative and alternative communication).

The idea of meeting regularly began with Andrew, who also proposed agenda topics and acted as host. Family members and friends encourage in practical ways–and listen! Bridges members usually gather in Guelph from all over southern Ontario, and there are corresponding members in faraway places too.

The pioneers shared a dream of Bridges-Over-Barriers (Bridges for short) as "a centre for friends and family who live with the challenges of Autism to come together to share support, ideas and community. Bridges is the beginning of an idea for us to build on a small community of adults with Autism who have been meeting a few times a year since January 2004. We have been developing our skills as communicators and sharing technology ideas and friendship. We want to extend this community of pioneers. We would like there to be more opportunities for others to benefit from our experience, and to encourage and train more supporters to help people with communication and movement differences."

In December 2005 Andrew as the Bridges founder formally asked the GSA Board to shelter the Bridges group, receiving and managing funds from donations and possible grants and including Bridges events in its liability insurance. The GSA directors readily agreed, very pleased at the initiative and how well the Bridges values of "Nothing about me without me" and "Though I may not speak with my voice, I have plenty to say" matched supported decision-making as a key element of the GSA model of creative support. Friends and well-wishers have been generous so that GSA and Bridges have been able to help more people who use Supported Typing and other forms of AAC to express thoughts and dreams.

Specific projects include training and practice for communicators and facilitators, video and print guides, a Facebook group, a blog by the Bridges host, and ways to enhance communication among the group in both real and virtual gatherings. Bridges members express their thoughts, senses and feelings in other ways. They appreciate art, music and dance. Two have published their life stories and more are in preparation. Several are poets. Several have found a talent for art. We thank the Eden Mills Arts Festival for including the "Bridges Art Collaborative" in its festival from 2016. In 2010, Bridges published its first film **In Our Own Words** accompanying a book of 112 pages with the same name and these chapter headings: Our community of communicators; Recognizing our needs to express ourselves and our rights to be heard; What it's like to live with Autism: understanding our movement differences; Let's talk about our senses; Sharing struggles and strategies to improve our lives; and The Bridges dream: sustaining our hopes.

The Bridges group and production of **In Our Own Words** also inspired the making of a short dramatic film **Holding in the Storm** (DVD and 40-page booklet) in 2014. Clearly, Bridges means a great deal to its members who have reflected:

> *"I think that being able to talk to others who use ST helps me talk more about how I feel about myself. I need to talk about this with people who understand why ST is important to each of us and how we need to mentor and encourage each other to keep trying new things even when it's uncomfortable."*
>
> *"I feel like my Bridges friends are my family too. It is important to feel like I belong to something and someone. I always learn something interesting from the meetings. I think that everyone tries very hard to be caring and respectful of each other–that is what friends do right."*
>
> *"I can express how I feel and it's okay. I am full of ideas that people want to hear about and I feel good about this. Now I am understood, not misunderstood, and people ask me what I need, not guess. I feel I belong now. When I didn't use ST I was misunderstood."*
>
> *"I think that through Bridges ST has gotten the attention of others and they are listening and understanding me better because I am not the only person who uses ST. I am one of many smart, intelligent, interesting people who are sharing their ideas and life with others. It is important that friends, supporters and allies keep listening and asking so they can understand."*

Friends and family members who have been privileged to observe Bridges conversations have learned so much. They are amazed by the fluency and insight of the communicators and their patience, empathy and generosity of spirit. As a result of their conversations, various Bridges members have taken the initiative to improve their lives.

Bridges has a wonderful agenda for developing and using our communication skills. But it had to be on hold for the duration of the pandemic that affects nonspeaking people with complex needs in some additional ways. We miss the precious gatherings in person where we shared our struggles and strategies. We need our facilitators to be close and able to touch to stabilize and encourage us. Some of us have nobody who is allowed even to visit us in our group homes. For the fortunate few of us who have a facilitator, we have been able to connect for virtual conversations using Zoom.

How can we activate Bridges again? People who care about us are generous, so we could hope Bridges will have some funds to encourage each keen communicator. Strategies and formats that were useful might be used again to assess the needs and potentials of Bridges members?

- Group meetings of 6-8 with each person using whatever communication method is comfortable and effective, as basis for choosing an interest group for more focused conversation. Could reading or copy-typing work?
- Individual communicators paired with a facilitator in separate setting such as home or classroom with in-depth activity designed to suit interests. Possible travel or attendance at an intensive learning experience like the Geneva-Integra summer programs to assess aptitude for any communication program or Syracuse-ICI for FC potential.
- Sending potential facilitators on bursaries for intensive training, either alone or accompanied by communicators with whom to work in future.
- Bringing in a master trainer or 2-3 to work with a classroom full of trainee facilitators or with an individual as Pascal was with Tim.

- Intensive reading etc to develop critical thinking about issues.
- Need for leadership.
- Researching how other groups find leaders and train facilitators.

If you would like to be connected with others who are trying to pool good ideas for improving opportunities for those who do not speak because of Autism or similar high complex needs, you could contact us as a first step.

Bridges-Over-Barriers
abc_andrew@hotmail.com / ebloomfi@uoguelph.ca

Look up "Bridges" on the OAARSN website at https:OAARSN.ca

Building a home for "Bridges"

AB 18 April 2012
In my mind the construction has begun
on our Bridges Centre.
It will be built in the woods
near water
with bridges over the water
and bridges to the doors.
It will be round like a new egg
and golden like the sun.

It will have
rooms to meet in and learn in,
rooms to sleep in and eat in.
There will be people gathered
outside and in,
enjoying being together.
I will be there, and my friends,
old ones and new ones,
with our dearest dog companions
there with us too.

Our Bridges Centre will have lots of light
with windows all around
and in the ceiling too.
with art made us,
books and computers
to use and enjoy.

The Bridges Centre will be a place
of peace and quiet,
love and laughing;
it will be a place of beauty;
a place where we might also
show our ugly warts.
But it will be safe to be there
and be ourselves.

Andrew the Runner, Man of Peace *(16 Oct 2009)*
Running is a way for me
to go with my feelings.
I think it helps clear my head
for good thinking.
Yes, running is an avenue to freedom for me.
It is a great way to make connections
with new people,
and that connects me with myself
more as well.
I feel like Andrew who runs,
not Andrew who is an autistic man.

I am free from the stress
of the sounds of home
and the hum of the world.
I just feel the sounds
of my own body and spirit.
Running is peaceful and calming for me.

I can free myself from all worries
and just run towards
the lightness of feeling
close to nature and God.

I feel a sense of being freed
from all things that restrict me.
I am running to me.
I feel so much better as a person
with the ropes of autism broken from me.

I am Andrew the runner.
I am Andrew who has hopes and dreams.
Andrew the runner,
now closer to being free and just me.

I am feeling inspired to share this
with others,
so they can also be free from the ropes,
and just be who God intended them to be-
--themselves.
I think that people will accept us more
if we accept ourselves.

Running gives me a sense of peace,
that you can only achieve
through loving yourself
and the wonderful creation you are.
I am running towards this person,
Andrew the runner.

I am Andrew the runner.
I love feeling this peace.
I can only run faster and harder
to find the runner in me.
Then I will be at peace.

I am Andrew the runner.
I want to run fast and furious.
I am challenging myself to be
a man of full potential,
and that includes my peace.

I am running to me.
I am Andrew the runner.

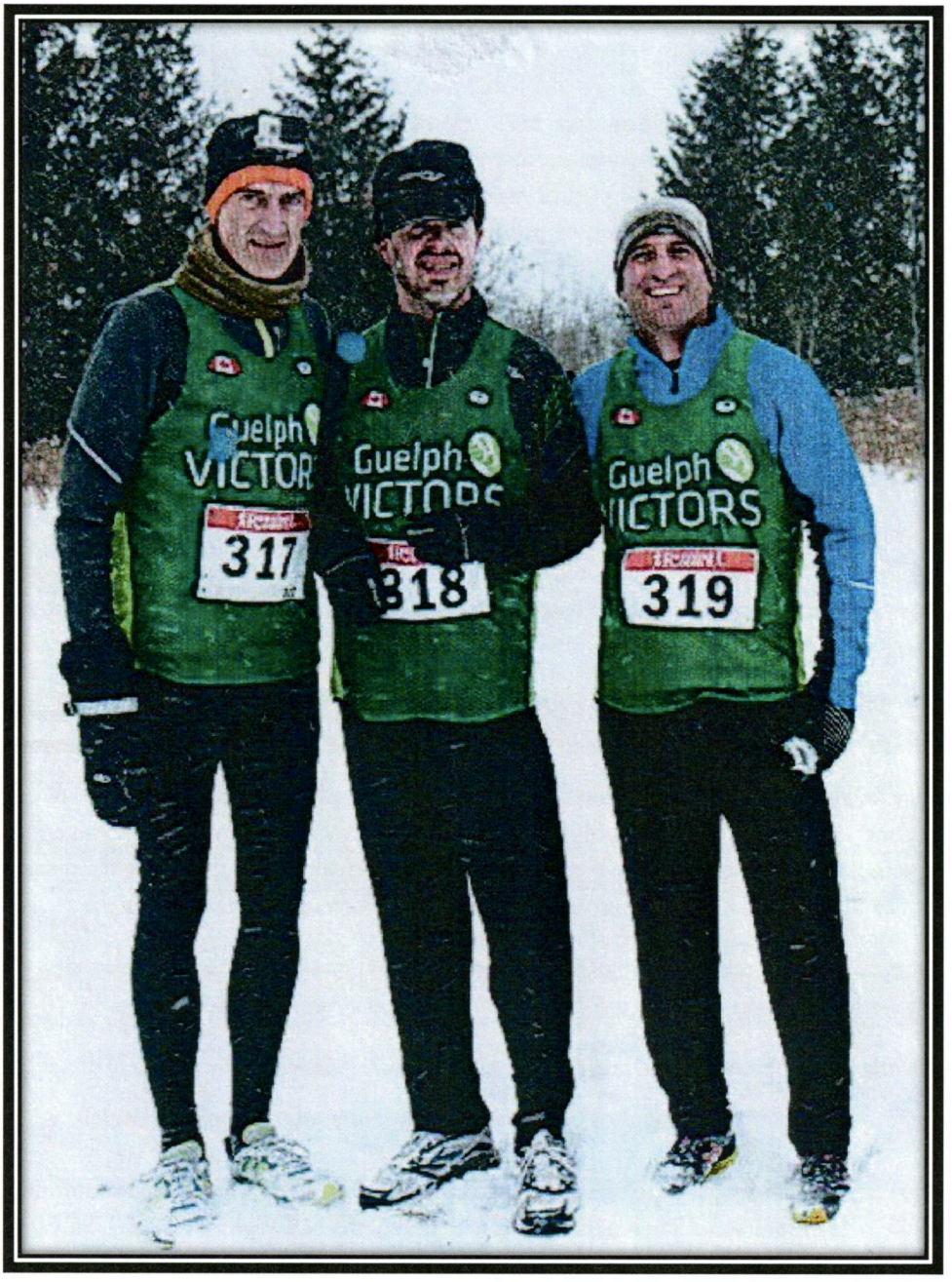
I am a Runner *(18 February 2011)*
I am able to run.
I am on my way to new things.
I feel the confidence in my steps.
I feel the air on my face
bringing me new life and breath.
I need these new ideas to feel alive.

When I run I am going someplace.
I am feeling exhausted and
refreshed at the same time,
releasing my energy and
feeling full of enthusiasm.

It is a way to express myself
without support
and I am in control.
A gentle reminder and call
from a fellow runner
gives me the nudge to keep going.
I run to feel my freedom
and I feel able to do what I need to.

I run to get someplace
to feel I can.
I am on my way to new things.
I run to get there.
I get there fast.
I feel full of peace upon my return.
I am a runner!

THE THREE AMIGOS: DEAN, ANDREW, DAVID



From personal supporters, therapists, teachers and facilitators.

Our earliest memory.... Sandi Bojm's contribution

It was summer,1975 when I met Andrew, during which time I was studying speech language pathology. Andrew was my camper and I his counsellor at a camp for autistic children. I remember him well; how fast he could out-run me, his big eyes, his cute bowl haircut, how he tapped my arm incessantly, and also his hugs. At the time I was also interested in the use of sign language with non-verbal children and, in fact, did the research for my thesis with Andrew's help. Years later I reconnected with Andrew's mom and learned about Andrew's life since those early days; how with ST, his beautiful insights, creativity and heart, so long before hidden, had become known to the world. There is so much to celebrate about Andrew's life, with much gratitude. Gone too soon, but his memory and legacy live on.

My contribution to the book: Sandi Bojm
(Camp Towhee, 1975), now of Vancouver

Andrew changed my life.

He changed the ways I thought about communication, my work, my relationships and my world generally.... and he did so with great gentleness, creativity and generosity.

Andrew especially helped me to change the ways I partnered with people with alternative ways of communicating and their loved ones. I have very fond memories of weekends at Spirit Valley Farm, running free and cleaning out the horse stalls with Kait - and I loved my own work with preschool children and their parents because of Andrew, his sister Vickie and his parents, Elizabeth and Gerald. They were a formidable team! Lucky me.

He was brave and considerate and kind and didn't miss much, although I will always miss him. One thing I won't miss is working together to complete very questionable and difficult government forms together(!)

Andrew was a strong and empathetic man and he will always be remembered by me and my family.

Susan Honeyman

Susan Honeyman: Speech Language Pathologist, supporter of Andrew's Augmentative and Alternative Communication from 1991, and advocate for the communication rights of Bridges-Over-Barriers.

It has been so hard for me to write to you after Andrew's death. I think it is because it would make it really true. Andrew (and his parents and sister) changed many aspects of my life and will continue to do so....Questions like:

- What it means to be kind?
- What you dream can be real?
- What is the essence of humanity?
- What it means to truly love someone?

Beth Komito-Gottlieb: Teacher of Andrew as a teenager; primary facilitator with Supported Typing from 2000 to 2013 and co-founder of Bridges Communication Group from 2004.

All of yours' and Andrew's Bridges friends, as well as so many others, were affected by Andrew. He was a dear, brave, honest and dedicated man, a leader and a teacher; your Green Man running. I hope we can all get together and remember Andrew. My thanks for all you did to help him make a good life. You were the most devoted, supportive and determined parents he could have had. You were pioneers with him on so many fronts, teaching us all about accompanying and accommodation. I treasure my years sharing part of yours' and Andrew's journey.

I believe that in whatever part of the universe Andrew is now in, he no longer needs facilitation to communicate and no longer must cope with a body that didn't always do what he wanted. He is now free.

Feeling Andrew's loss: Nadia von Windheim founder of the Eden Mills Arts Festival imagining Heidi's *sense of loss, I hope you can find comfort in knowing that you greatly enriched Andrew's life. He is a part of you in ways that you might not even realize now. Just like you influenced his life, he has left his mark on you. He will always be in your thoughts, you will always see things differently because Andrew taught you to do that, many of your actions and the way you do things will be coloured by Andrew's life having crossed paths with your life. He will never be gone, Heidi, because Andrew is a part of you.*

Claire, *personal supporter to Andrew as a teenager, now general manager of Bridges Canada. Andrew has had an immense influence on my life and I will miss him, Andrew has helped shape what I know and believe about communication. I will hold tight to what he has taught me and continue to share his lessons.*

Nancy, ally in advocacy. *It has been an honour meeting the Bloomfield family. I have learned so much from the three of you! Andrew was a trailblazer for all adults with complex needs. Your love and support made it possible for him to flourish in this role. He will be missed.*

Monica, *personal supporter and film-maker 1996-1998. Andrew was such a wonderful and brilliant person. I'm thankful to have known him and got to witness the emergence of his voice, thoughts and creativity. He was a good and thoughtful friend.*

Teresa, *Andrew's first full-time tutor while settling into his new home, 1997-1999. "What the three of you accomplished over the course of all these years is beyond compare: a testament to wisdom, resourcefulness, strength and love. Such an inspiring gift of how well-lived a life can be."*

Karen, community support worker team member of communication support group in 1991

I will always have memories of Vickie, Andrew and Zach, exploring new adventures around Guelph and our many long walks together. What I learned from Andrew and your family was fundamental in the building blocks of my career and for that I will always be grateful. Teaching him in his early years was definitely a privilege. I am in awe of all that he accomplished in his life. May he rest in eternal peace. bkbowen05@gmail.com

Parents and Bridges members

I am so very glad to hear from you. You and Gerry have been constantly on my mind these last few days. Kevin and I are heartbroken, and I can't imagine the pain you must be in.

*The Bloomfields have been the heart of autism education for as long as we can remember

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I am sad that Andrew has died. I will remember him in my heart, and I will always be happy that he was my friend and that he invited us Bridges members to his house. I will cherish a large horse picture on my bedroom wall, painted by Andrew, with a picture of Andrew beside it.

I am glad that you want to remember Andrew's dream to help all people with autism to have a good life. Bridges can help me by helping my group home learn to FC with me. I still am not allowed to FC in my group home. I hope you can find people who let me talk by FC.

Ken Moon & Family

We are shocked and heartbroken to hear of the devastating loss of our dear, sweet friend, Andrew. We are so grateful to have known your wonderful, brave son, who has helped so many non-verbal, autistic people, including our son, John, to live their best lives due to his efforts. Our hearts go out to you.

He was a powerful role model for those who were once voiceless but now have the ability to communicate through Supported Typing. We will be forever grateful to Andrew for the life-changing Bridges-Over-Barriers Group. His wonderful video and book, ***In Our Own Words****, is used by the staff at John's group home to teach Supported Typing to new employees.*

Although Andrew had many challenges in his life, he was fortunate to have been blessed with wonderful supportive parents who gave him the best life possible.

We hope it helps to know that many friends are thinking of you at this sad time.

John, Jim and Anne Morris-Dadson

Sue Near: *Wonderful to hear from you Elizabeth! Thank you!*

I wanted to get back to you quickly. We are truly grateful for your dedication to Bridges Over Barriers and our loved ones!

I'll write more later, or Christopher, but had to share this right away because Andrew referred to himself as 'Green Man' repeatedly in piece you've shared in this email.

I saw Christopher yesterday. I knew it was must share the news about Andrew's death. He typed to me that he knew this, smiled and gave me a huge hug. He typed more which I'll send along later but this you must hear.....He signed off with from, Blue Man and Green Light.

Close friends & facilitators

I want to tell you first how grateful Isaac and I are for Andrew's life. Knowing Andrew remains one of the most important things to have happened to us. Isaac wrote "I loved him like a brother. Please tell his mother I am sorry for her loss."

Although we have not seen Andrew since before the pandemic, I have thought of him constantly and spoken of him to every person we know in our local AAC community, often 2-3 times a month. You may know of the Milivojevich family in Mississsauga who have been following your Andrew's work as they fight the Peel School Board in an OHRC claim. It was Andrew M's dream that Nicholas would meet Andrew B and they were very sad to hear of Andrew's passing.

Andrew stays with us and we will keep talking about him. His legacy is vast. His loss seems unfathomable. I can't imagine this experience for you both and want to acknowledge your loss of Vicky too.

I do believe that Andrew has a bigger plan though. We who loved him like a brother will help carry out Andrew's plan. As we do that, if there is anything that would bring comfort to you both, please allow us to do those things (with you and for you).

Sending love and deep appreciation to you and others closest to Andrew.

Isaac Wong & Cathy Wright

Sunny I'm writing this mail at Bloomfield, NaMam Centre thinking of you. Andrew's music therapist in Korea. Yesterday I was so sad after I sent an e-mail to you. Most of all I can't go there to see you.. I said to Daniel, Yeojung and my family and some friends who know Andrew. Daniel missed him so much because he met Andrew recently and he knew all the story about Andrew and me because he was also the member of the concert, "The Music Story of Autistic Poet Andrew". We have huge amount of good, wonderful memory with Andrew and all of you. My mom will pray for Andrew for 100 days. I'll, too. Please take care of yourself, Eli and Gerry... I miss you so much.

Sunny "artblooming"

My name is Eunice, I'm Tim's assistant at L'arche. I'm so sorry to hear the sad news about Andrew. My sincerest condolences. I'm so fortunate to be able to meet him even if just via zoom meeting. He's a such a smart great guy and was full of Love! For sure Tim will dearly miss him! My thoughts and my prayers are with your family and Jesse.

Eunice Kroeger

Dearest Elizabeth, I am so very shocked and saddened by your news, and my heart breaks for you and Gerry. Dearest Andrew. It is so difficult to imagine this world without him! Had you any idea, in those last peaceful six weeks, what was coming? My heart is really too full to say anything coherent or comforting, but I wish I could be with you, even for a moment. When did this happen? I hope to be able to pick Tim up Wednesday morning. If we are able to be together we will have much to share and to grieve, and to celebrate too. I suspect Tim already knows. Dear, sweet Andrew. May you and Gerry find the strength to get through this.

With all my love, Betty

I knew Andrew for over 20 years. We got to know each other when I was in high school and Andrew and I would work together on the horse farm on weekends. Together we would look after the horses, work in the barn and wander around the farm.

Andrew opened up a whole new world of communication and ways of understanding for me. The more I learned over the years the more I came to appreciate how rich Andrew's inner life was and how revolutionary his augmentative communications work was in sharing his inner life with the rest of us.

Andrew was an incredible community builder. Becoming friends with Andrew opened up a new way of being to me and an appreciation for the importance of community. I am really inspired by the diverse community of friends that surrounds Andrew and how that supported Andrew to realize many different parts of himself.

Andrew was always so generous with me and taught me at a young age how much can be communicated without words. I am a better person for having known him and I'll miss him dearly. I'll continue to cherish his writing and my memories of the time we spent together.

Spending time and working together was always PERRRFECT!

Kaitlin Breton-Honeyman

Understanding Myself: conversations with Penny Tompkins and James Lawley, authors of ***Metaphors in Mind: Transformation through Symbolic Modelling*** *(2000).*

James Lawley and I received the following email from Andrew in 2018:

> "Please may we ask your advice about our strong interest in exploring "Clean Language" to help and empower some adults with Autism/Apraxia who use AAC as they cannot speak with their voices? "We got to know of your work when a member of our team attended a training course with you in Austin Texas in 2013. She felt the approach could help me and some others in understanding and clearing roadblocks in our path. I found this to be true for me. I use metaphors a lot anyway in my art and poetry. But I also liked the cleanness of leaving it to me to come up with metaphors, explanations, and strategies. This also seems to offer a way to show people who might doubt our abilities that I am the author of my words. While Clean Language was not designed for people like us who do not speak, I find it very therapeutic."

Andrew allowed most of our sessions to be video recorded, and shown publicly, especially at large conferences specialising in Neurodiversity. He wanted to share with others a process that had helped him so much. Sometimes we worked therapeutically, and sometimes we just had a chat about whatever topic interested Andrew, always using Clean Language.

Andrew was a gift to the world, an inspiration to us and we miss him already. *Just knowing we would be having a chat with him and Jesse gladdened my heart. We told so many people about his unique spirit and determination. I feel privileged to have had him in our lives.*

Penny Tompkins.

P.S. You can read Andrew's article, 'What is Clean Language and why is it important?' at:
cleanlanguage.com/author/andrew-bloomfield/

Gordon Gates, ***Trauma, Stigma, and Autism: Developing Resilience and Loosening the Grip of Shame*** *(1919). Gord was diagnosed with ASD as an adult and has written several books and is well connected with others on the spectrum. He writes: "I came to visit him in Guelph after Andrew helped me so much when I was writing my book. I just heard through the grapevine that he passed earlier in January. I am in shock and can't imagine the devastating loss you and your family must be feeling. Andrew was so sweet and kind and creative. My life was enriched just knowing him and he inspired me in many ways. The world has lost a great advocate and wonderful individual. Is there is anything I can do at this difficult time?*

SHARING BLESSINGS....

Come and find the quiet centre
in the crowded life we lead,
Find the room we hope to enter,
find the frame where we are freed:
Clear the chaos and the clutter,
clear our eyes, that we may see
All the things that really matter,
be at peace and simply be.
In the Spirit let us travel, open to each other's pain,
Let our lives and fears unravel,
celebrate the space we gain . . .
--sent to Andrew in 2004 by Bryan Burton in New Zealand

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Blessed are you who take time
to "listen" to us who cannot speak,
for you help us to know that
if we persevere,
we can be understood.

Blessed are you who walk
with us in public places
and ignore the stares of strangers,
for in your companionship
we find havens of relaxation.

Blessed are you, who never bid us 'hurry up'
and more blessed are you, who do not snatch our tasks
from our hands to do them for us,
for often we need time rather than help.

Blessed are you who stand beside us
as we enter new ventures,
for our failures will be outweighed by times
we surprise ourselves and you.

Blessed are you who ask for our help,
for our greatest need is to be needed.

Blessed are you when
by all these things you assure us
that the thing that makes us individuals
is not our peculiar muscles,
nor our wounded nervous system,
but the God-given self, that no infirmity can confine.

-Marjorie Chappell, England

SONG OF HOPE FOR BRIDGES-OVER-BARRIERS

We are many and we are one:
The bridges that connect us are
Our minds and our bodies that
others may find to hard to accept.

Together we find acceptance,
Together we find hope,
Together we find community.

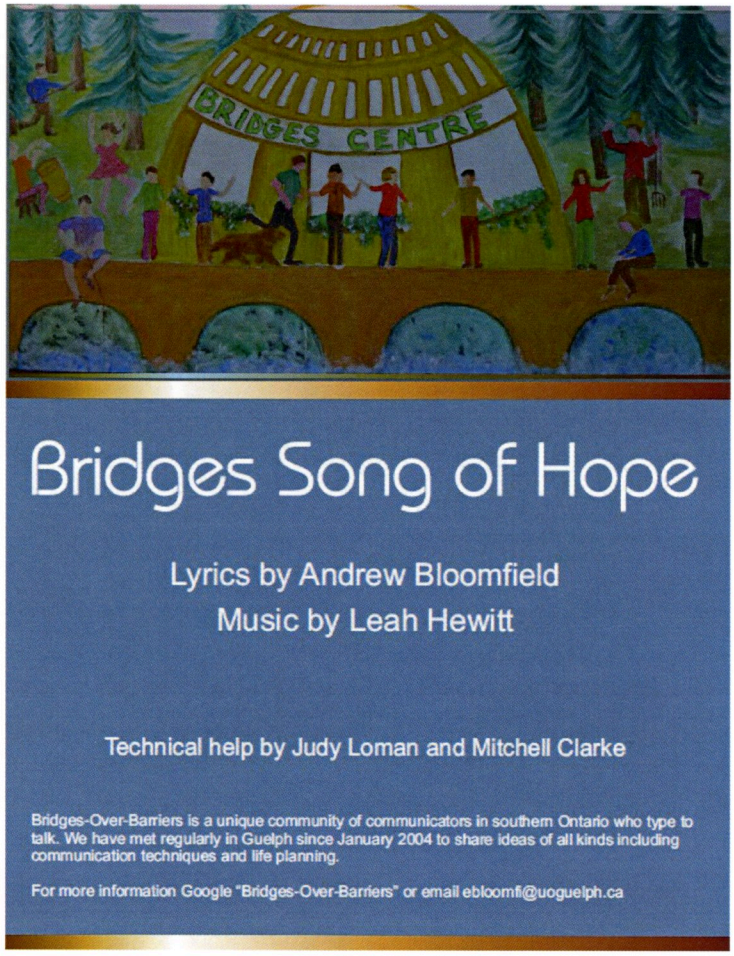
We are many and we are one:
The bridges that connect us are
Our words and our feelings
Though they flow from our fingertips
and not our lips.

Together we find acceptance,
Together we find hope,
Together we find community.

We are many and we are one:
The bridges that connect us are
Our family and friends who
facilitate our interactions
with each other and the world.

*Together we **are** **acceptance,***
*Together we **are** hope,*
*Together we **are** community.*

(Idea and words by Andrew, 2010)


BRIDGES CENTRE
Bridges Song of Hope
Lyrics by Andrew Bloomfield
Music by Leah Hewitt
Technical help by Judy Loman and Mitchell Clarke
Bridges-Over-Barriers is a unique community of communicators in southern Ontario who type to talk. We have met regularly in Guelph since January 2004 to share ideas of all kinds including communication techniques and life planning.
For more information Google "Bridges-Over-Barriers" or email ebloomfi@uoguelph.ca